

Guahan Academy seeks help, will reopen Monday

Haidee V Eugenio, heugenio@guampdn.com Published 5:45 p.m. ChT Sept. 13, 2017



(Photo: Haidee Eugenio/PDN)

Guam's first charter school still can't secure an occupancy permit for its middle and high school facility at Tiyan, so classes, scheduled to start Thursday, have now been postponed to next Monday.

Guahan Academy Charter School is also seeking full government funding for the estimated 1,015 enrolled students for school year 2017-2018, despite a government budget cap of 740 students.

Guahan Academy's middle and high school students have already missed 11 school days as of Wednesday, and the school has so far only identified nine make-up days, school officials said.

"Please help us," Guahan Academy board chairwoman Fe Valencia-Ovalles told the Guam Academy Charter Schools Council during a work session Wednesday morning.

The school gets \$6,500 per student, carved out by lawmakers from the Department of Education budget. Senators set the cap for fiscal 2018 at 740 students, despite the school getting approval from the council for higher enrollment. Charter school officials said lawmakers knew about the enrollment boost since January.

Valencia-Ovalles said Guahan Academy and the Guam Department of Education get their funding from the same source, so GDOE and the Legislature can help by funneling DOE funds to the charter school instead.

She said sending 260 students from the charter school back to DOE will defeat the purpose of giving parents a choice of where to enroll their children.

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Guahan Academy board treasurer Victor Perez said parents recognized the quality of education at the charter school, which is why enrollment grew by more than 200 in just a two-month period.

Superintendent Jon Fernandez offered GDOE's help for a smooth transition of the estimated 260 students back to their districts should Guahan Academy choose to dis-enroll them as a result of the funding cap.

Joseph Cabana, Guahan Academy's finance officer, said the school won't be able to pay for its campus expansion if it doesn't receive funding for all 1,015 students.

Guahan Academy officials told the council that the school reopening depends on whether or not the school's private vendor, working on the campus' fire safety code compliance, can finish the job.

As of 4 p.m. Wednesday, the Guam Fire Department had not issued a clearance to Guahan Academy, GFD spokesperson Kevin Reilly said.

If and when GFD gives the green light, Guahan Academy still needs to get the approval of Public Works, which is the last signatory before an occupancy permit is released.

The Department of Public Works ordered Guahan Academy to shut down temporarily after the school opened for one day, on Sept. 5, without a building occupancy permit.

Guahan Academy has also scheduled a meeting with parents and guardians of elementary, middle and high school students on Thursday, Sept. 14, at 6 p.m. in the elementary campus cafeteria.

Reporter Haidee Eugenio covers Guam's Catholic church issues, education and more. Follow her on Twitter [@haidee_eugenio](https://twitter.com/haidee_eugenio) (https://twitter.com/haidee_eugenio). Follow Pacific Daily News on Facebook/GuamPDN (<http://www.facebook.com/guampdn/>) and Instagram [@guampdn](http://instagram.com/GuamPDN) (<http://instagram.com/GuamPDN>).

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